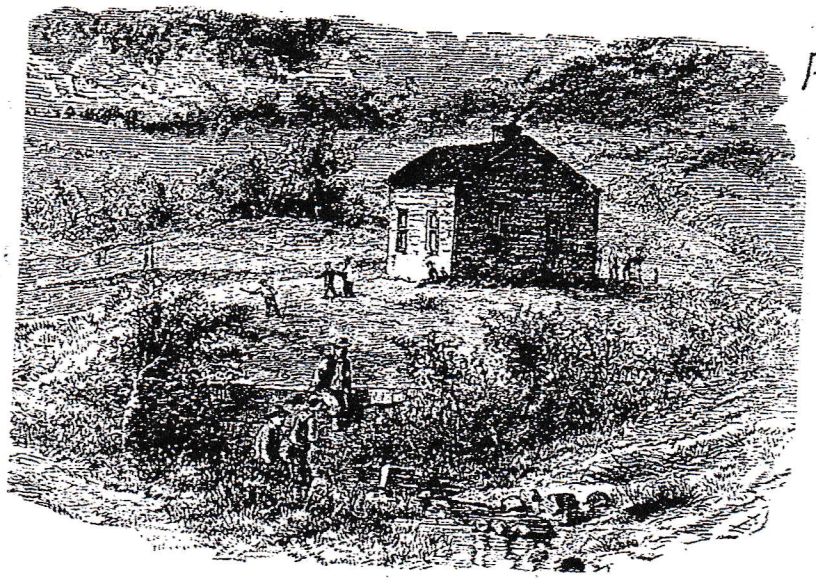

Ford County Press 12/15/77

The Sixteenth Section

BY MIKE ARENDS
Melvin-Sibley Junior High School

Congressional District

THE MELVIN-SIBLEY School District receives income from a "school section" established by the Ordinance of 1785. This ordinance divided the Northwest Territory into townships. Each township had thirty-six sections, each section covered an area of one square mile, and the sixteenth section in every township was set aside as school land. Income from the property went to support education. In Illinois very few of these sections are still being used to support the schools, but in Ford County income from land in Township 24 North, Range 8 East continues to go to the schools.

Three land commissioners govern the section. Each commissioner serves a three-year term, and a different one is elected each year. These commissioners have full responsibility and power for managing the property as they see fit. The men who actually farm this fertile soil present their plans to the commissioners, and it is up to the commissioners to accept, reject, or modify the plans.

The records of the treasurer for school land show that in the early 1940's the original section was rented to a farmer for $8.00 per acre. On July 1, 1947, the lease was changed from a cash rent lease to a 50-50 grain lease in which the farmer and the land commissioners divided crop expenses and income. The commissioners sell their half of the grain, make capital improvements to the ground and to two homes on the land, and decide how much money will be provided to support the schools.

At first all profits were used to help support one-room country schools in the township. But after the school consolidation in 1949, the money was divided between Gibson City and Melvin-Sibley according to the number of students from the township attending each school system. In 1954 the state authorized the treasurer for school land to send the money to the Ford County treasurer to pay a portion of the school tax assessment on each piece of real estate in the township. The amount spent for education has ranged from $4,500 in 1948 to $65,000 for the past year. This income is still used to educate children from the township who attend the Melvin-Sibley and Gibson City schools, even though the money is not paid directly to the school systems.—[From John D. Hicks, *The Federal Union: A History of the United States to 1877*, pp. 171-72; interviews with Mrs. Ruth Pool and Emerson Busick of Melvin.]

OLD RECORDS OF SCHOOL LAND — Mrs. Lucile Goodrich, county superintendent of schools, inspects records of section 16 in Fayette township which show the 640-acre section was sold and repossessed twice by the township since 1868. The section is one of five in the state and the only one in the county still owned by its township, and was used until 1954 for support of township schools. John Bradshaw, deputy circuit clerk, shows Mrs. Goodrich a mortgage agreement for one of the sales. — (Leader Photo.)

School Land in Fayette Twp. Has Been Boon to Taxpayers

By PAUL McNAIR,
Leader Staff Reporter.

Some bad loans made many years ago on 640 acres of farm land influenced a decision to keep the land, and this has meant a great saving in tax money for Fayette township residents in Livingston county and Sullivant township in Ford county.

The land referred to is known as section 16, and is one of five 16th sections kept by townships in the state since the land was granted to them by the federal land grant of 1787. Over the years, this section has earned an estimated total of $315,000 for the two townships.

According to the grant, this territory was divided into townships containing 30 sections of 640 acres each, and the 16th section of each township set aside for support of township schools.

In 1818, an Illinois law granted the state section 16 of each township for support of common schools. However, this policy became troublesome, due to squatting and spoiling on the unoccupied land.

Change Policy.

Also, Illinois wanted to attract more settlers to the state and to see lands pass rapidly into private ownership. It was felt the sale of these school lands would help meet costs of public education, and these factors outweighed arguments for keeping the sections as permanent sources of revenue.

Therefore, the state legislature abandoned its earlier policy of renting common school lands and authorized their sale at liberal terms. The legislature also authorized appointment of a county commissioner to handle details of disposal.

According to law, only townships containing 50 white males 1868, at a cost of $9,680, or $30.25 an acre.

On the same day, he turned the land over to his brother, Philander Morgan who quitclaimed the 80 acres in the east half of the northeast corner to James Osborne, on Nov. 13, 1869.

This transaction left Philander Morgan with a debt of $5,000 on his property and Osborne with a debt of $2,340 on his one lot. The township trustees held mortgages on all of the land sold.

Lots 5 and 6, the southwest quarter of the section, were sold Nov. 18, 1868, to Jules, Joseph and Lewis Gillet, for $3,680, or $23 an acre.

Lot 7, the west half of the southwest quarter, was bought by Alfred Cooper on Nov. 12, 1868, for $2,000, or $25 an acre, and lot 8 was sold for $2,000 to Charles Kingman the same day.

Mortgage terms were for five annual payments at eight per cent interest.

Loans to farmers were bad risks in those days, because there was little income from grain crops, and the early settlers on the section failed to make payments and lost their lands.

Buy Land Back.

Because they did not convey their lands back to the township, a public land sale was held in 1870, and the township school trustees bought back the land. For all but one of the mortgaged properties, the trustees paid a higher price than the land's original sale price.

Next buyer for the land was Michael Sullivant, prominent owner of vast farm land in the area. The trustees again held mortgages on their property, purchased by Sullivant in September 1871 and January 1872.

In June 1875, Sullivant put up

was apportioned to the schools on the basis of the number of children in average daily attendance.

Schools in Fayette and Sullivant townships benefited from this arrangement, because their combined 30 sections were the original township to which the 16th section was granted. The south boundary of the section is located on the Livingston-Ford county line.

Accept Share of Crops.

Tenants farming the land no longer could meet the cash rents during the depression, and in 1933, the trustees began accepting a share of the grain crops as rent.

Records of rent money show $60,300 received from 1908 to 1922. Records of annual rents were not available for the years from 1923 to 1933, but an estimate for this period, based on an average years' rent of $4,300, would boost the total rents received to at least $103,000.

Harry Koehler, retired Sibley farmer who has kept accounts of the section since July 1, 1934, said that an estimated $125,000 was received from 1934 to 1954 in grain rents from tenant farmers.

Under this arrangement, the townships pay half the cost of soybean and corn seed and fertilizer and pay for necessary repairs and insurance.

Distribute Money.

In 1954, a state law abolished the office of school trustees, set up a land commission for management of the section, and provided that the township's profits from the section were to be paid to Livingston and Ford county treasurers. The county treasurers distribute this money to individual taxpayers of Fayette and Sullivan townships, on the basis of assessed valuation of their property.

This refund makes the tax load lighter in these two townships.

The 16th section is tax free.

Since 1955, taxpayers of the two townships have realized a total tax saving of $87,001. Fayette township's share of this was $47,941, and Sullivant township taxpayers have received $39,060.

Other income is from interest on government bonds purchased from the section's $3,900 loan fund. The townships also receive monthly rent from a Sibley tin shop, which once had been a grocery store built on a loan from this fund and later repossessed.

Four Tenants.

Tenants farming the four 160 acre quarters of the section are Fred Adam, northwest quarter; Edward Pope, northeast quarter; William H. Brandt, southwest quarter and A. J. Walters, southeast quarter.

Paul Goembel, Strawn, will replace Adam, and Rowe Blissard, Rantoul, will replace Brandt this year as tenants.

Land commissioners for section 16 are Donald Althouse, Sibley, and Harvey Leman and Wayne Decker, both of Strawn.

Koehler believes that most residents of the townships would be against the sale of this section which has proved to be a wise investment.

He observed, "What could they invest the money in that would be safer than annual income from the land?"

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Superintendent of Educational Service Region

The act of Congress which admitted Illinois to the Union in 1818 set aside the sixteenth section of every township for the use of schools. In 1819, therefore, the General Assembly directed the county commissioners' court in each county to appoint three trustees from each township. These trustees, whose terms ran for four years, were charged with hiring a surveyor, laying out section 16 into lots, leasing those lots for no more than a ten year period, and appointing a clerk and treasurer to handle the leases.[1] In 1827 this was modified to give the trustees responsibility for laying out school districts within the township. These districts were to contain no fewer than 18 scholars, and the trustees were to hire a teacher for the district.[2]

The situation changed in 1829, when Congress agreed to permit the sale of section 16 lands. For the first time, the county commissioners' court could appoint a commissioner and agent for the county school lands. This position was the predecessor of the regional superintendent of schools. The commissioner was required to prepare a record of the school lands in the county. When nine-tenths of the voters in any township decided to sell their school lands, they were required to petition the commissioner in writing. In turn, he arranged the sale, and loaned the money from the sale back to the township.[3]

During the 1830's, minor changes were made in the school law. The percentage of voters required to sign a petition for sale of school lands was reduced and the county commissioners' court again appointed township school trustees. Most important, in 1837 the citizens of a township were given the choice of incorporating for the purpose of establishing and supporting common schools. The trustees were assigned the superintendence of the township schools, and they could appoint a clerk, who would also act as treasurer.

The school land commissioner was required to pay to this treasurer all of the money in his care which belonged to the township, and would deliver to him all bonds, notes, and mortgages. The township treasurer made an abstract, in return, which showed the name of each teacher, the number of scholars at each school, and the total number of days taught. The treasurer was to deliver this abstract to the school land commissioner and receive the interest due the township from the state's school, college, and seminary lands.[4]

In 1841, the office of school commissioner became elective, for a term of two years. This same year, each school district was required to elect a board of three school directors, also for two-year terms. The school directors were empowered to select building sites, build schools, employ teachers, and visit the district schools.

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In townships which had not chosen to incorporate, the trustees of school lands could appoint school directors if none were elected.[5]

The school law was under continual revision during the 1840's, and in 1845 the school commissioner was made *ex officio* county superintendent of the common schools. His duties included visiting the schools, examining teachers, and issuing certificates.[6] By 1865, each county elected a superintendent of schools every four years. Township school trustees reported to this superintendent on the number of schools, the number of scholars, the number of male and female teachers, the compensation of teachers, the number of persons under age 21 in the township, the principal and interest of the township fund, the amount of the common school fund received by the treasurer, the amount raised by taxation, all other receipts and expenditures, and any other information required by the superintendent.[7]

The primary duties of the present superintendent of an educational service region remain much the same as they were in the nineteenth century. The superintendent conducts teachers' institutes, handles the school lands, visits the schools, examines the accounts of all school treasurers in the county, and distributes state money for education to the school districts in his charge.[8]

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[1]L. 1819, pp. 107-109.
[2]L. 1827, pp. 366-370.
[3]L. 1829, pp. 150-154.
[4]L. 1831, pp. 172-176; L. 1837, pp. 314-320.
[5]L. 1841, pp. 259-287.
[6]L. 1845, pp. 51-74.
[7]L. 1857, pp. 259-298; L. 1865, p. 112.
[8]PA 76-735.

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